

Abortion battles heat up across the country

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — From the halls of Congress and state legislatures to the streets and courthouses of cities in Illinois and North Dakota, abortion battles continued to heat up across the country last week.

Of key national interest were legislative fights on Capitol Hill over federal funding of abortion as a method of family planning, both at home and abroad.

On the federal level:

- The House of Representatives voted 234-188 June 12 to include \$20 million for the U.N. Population Fund in a foreign-aid bill. The U.N. agency has been denied U.S. funding in recent years because it helps fund China's population program, which includes forced abortions.

- The same day the U.S. House voted 222-200 to override a government rule that requires non-governmental family planning organizations abroad to exclude abortion activities from their program in order to receive U.S. foreign aid. A Senate foreign-aid bill with a similar provision was approved in committee June 11, setting the stage for a floor fight on the issue in the Senate.

- Bills were introduced in both the House and Senate to add abortion services to the Title X family planning program under which U.S. family planning clinics receive federal funding.

The congressional battle over use of Title

X funds to subsidize abortion services heated up after the U.S. Supreme Court in May upheld the constitutionality of federal rules excluding abortion-related activities from the program.

The Planned Parenthood Federation of America, one of the chief beneficiaries of abortion-related federal funding while court challenges prevented implementation of the exclusion rule, on June 11 announced a multimillion-dollar national campaign to get the Title X law changed to add abortion-related services.

President George Bush has vowed to veto any legislation reversing the government's policy of not funding abortion services.

At the state level:

- Louisiana Gov. Buddy Roemer June 14 vetoed legislation that would have prohibited abortion except to save the life of the mother or for pregnancies resulting from rape or incest. The state's Catholic bishops June 17 urged the Legislature to override the veto.

- Two weeks earlier, Nebraska enacted a law requiring that parents be notified before abortions are performed on their minor daughters.

- In Alabama, a House-approved bill to outlaw abortions except in cases of rape, incest or danger to the mother's life awaited Senate action. The Senate Health Committee, which earlier approved a separate bill with identical language, was expected

to move the bill to the Senate floor, where observers expected a lengthy fight in July.

- In Maryland, organizers of a drive to overturn the state's new liberal abortion law submitted more than 30,000 signatures May 31 to put the law to a statewide referendum in 1992. They needed a total of 33,373 signatures of registered voters by June 30 to get the referendum on the ballot.

- In Pennsylvania, the Senate June 12 overwhelmingly approved "living will" legislation after amending it to require life-sustaining care for comatose and terminally ill pregnant women in order to save the life of the child. The House was expected to approve the measure before the end of June. Gov. Robert P. Casey said he supports the legislation.

Not all abortion-related activity was limited to legislatures. Abortion protests, court cases and efforts to provide alternatives to abortion were also in the news.

Mike Gerrety, police chief of Redwood Falls, Minn., provoked an uproar in his hometown when he was arrested May 31 in Fargo, N.D., for trespassing and resisting arrest during a protest at the Fargo Women's Health Organization, the only North Dakota clinic performing legal abortions.

In mid-June Gerrety and 23 others arrested with him remained in jail awaiting a court date. They refused to post bail or identify themselves.

Gerrety, a Catholic, has been Redwood Falls' police chief for 12 years. He described his abortion protest as part of his life's work "to protect innocent victims of crime." In the June issue of *The Minnesota Police Journal* he urged other police officers to join in picketing abortion clinics.

In Peoria, Ill., a Franciscan sister and a Catholic Social Service employee, arrested last October while praying the rosary in front of an abortion clinic, were convicted of criminal trespass May 24 after a two-day trial. The two women, Sister Mary Jo Yutt, 65, and Rose Waller, 33, planned to file a motion June 21 for a re-trial.

A federal judge in Chicago May 28 dismissed a lawsuit accusing protesters who picketed abortion clinics of violating federal racketeering and antitrust laws. U.S. District Judge James F. Holderman said the racketeering and antitrust laws could not be applied because the protesters' motivations were political, not financial or commercial.

Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington announced June 11 that his archdiocese, in cooperation with the area's three Catholic hospitals, was launching a Birthing and Care Program to help women facing crisis pregnancies choose birth rather than abortion.

The program, which will begin July 1, is to pay for prenatal, delivery and postpartum care for women who do not have insurance or qualify for government aid.

Presbyterians reject liberal sex document

BALTIMORE (CNS) — U.S. Presbyterian leaders gathered in Baltimore June 10 overwhelmingly rejected a document that would have approved homosexual, bisexual and non-marital sexual relationships if they were based on "justice-love."

By a 534-31 vote the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) repudiated the 197-page report, "Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Justice."

The report, developed by a 17-member task force, sold more than 27,000 copies and created an immediate furor among Presbyterian congregations across the nation when it was released earlier this year.

It urged closing the "gap ... between official church teachings and the sexual practices of most people" by replacing heterosexual marriage as the norm with the principle that "where there is justice-love, sexual expression has ethical integrity."

"That moral principle applies to single

as well as to married persons, to gay, lesbian and bisexual persons as well as to heterosexual persons," the report said. "The moral norm for Christians ought not be marriage, but rather justice-love."

Among its recommendations the report called on the Presbyterian Church to ordain active homosexuals and to develop a wedding-like ceremony for "recognition of committed same-sex relationships."

The commissioners, or voting members of the General Assembly, cheered when the vote rejecting the report was announced. About 300 gay-rights demonstrators carried a wooden cross through the convention hall in silent protest.

Before the General Assembly began, eight former heads of the church and more than half its 171 regional presbyteries had urged rejection of the report.

At a hearing three days before the vote, representatives of 43 presbyteries spoke out against the report and none supported it.

In separate votes June 10 the assembly:

- Decided to send a pastoral letter to the church's 10,500 congregations, encouraging continued study of sexual issues but affirming "the sanctity of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman" and reaffirming previous church statements that homosexuality "is not God's wish for humanity."

- Approved a policy statement calling sexual misconduct by clergy a "terrible" crisis and urging local and regional bodies to develop policies of quick response to allegations of sexual misconduct by clergy.

The Presbyterian debate and vote on the sexuality report was closely watched by other mainline Protestant churches embroiled in debates about their teachings on sexuality.

The Episcopal Church is facing a vote this July on whether to ordain practicing homosexuals. Recently, an Episcopal bishop ordained a woman who is living in a lesbian relationship.



AP/Wide World Photos
Gordon Stewart, chairman of the General Assembly's Committee on Human Sexuality, holds a copy of the committee's report during discussion at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Baltimore June 10.



AP/Wide World Photos
PROPOSED PATRON SAINT — Roman Catholic St. Gabriel Possenti has been proposed as the patron saint of handgun owners. John M. Snyder, the promoter for the special designation, said "the saint rescued an entire village because of his proficiency in use of a handgun."

Primate: Northern Ireland desperate to win peace

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Bringing peace to Northern Ireland will be difficult, but politicians must listen to the majority of Catholics and Protestants who are "desperately anxious" for it, the primate of all Ireland said.

Cardinal-designate Cahal B. Daly of Armagh told Vatican Radio in early June that most Irish believe if the current talks break off "it would retard the hope of some kind of settlement for many years to come."

"I think politicians would be very slow to take the responsibility for bringing that about," he said.

After almost two months of starts and stops, the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland agreed to begin face-to-face talks June 17. Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, has been excluded because it refuses to renounce violence.

"The politicians are listening and have got to listen to the voice of the majority out there who are desperately anxious for these talks to succeed," the cardinal-designate said.

Sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, which has claimed nearly 3,000 lives since 1969, escalated in late May as what the primate called "talks about talks" were underway.

While some saw the renewed violence as an attempt "to sabotage the hope of talks," he said, "on the contrary, I think the violence is going to give more incentive and create a greater sense of urgency on the politicians to get the talks going."

The cardinal-designate visited the military base where three soldiers were killed May 31 by the Irish Republican Army.

He said he hoped the visit would be "of some little consolation" to the families and "give them an awareness that their heartbreak is shared by many others."

"And perhaps that a Catholic bishop should attend the scene of an outrage perpetrated by IRA personnel and offer sympathy to people who are Protestants and unionists, that this might perhaps bring an added note of comfort in both communities," he said.

He repeated what he had said before — that there is no difference between Protes-

tant tears and Catholic tears: "They're all human tears."

"They're not colored green, they're not colored orange. They're just human tears of distress."

Cardinal-designate Daly said that in some urban enclaves and rural areas where "paramilitary, loyalist or republican" factions are very strong, people "keep silent" about their hopes for the talks and an end to violence.

"But they are doing it in their prayers and in the numbers which will come to special devotions of prayer for peace," he said.

"There's a very strong groundswell of opinion out there in the wider community, both Catholic and Protestant, that the politicians should continue talking and somehow that the talks should bring about an agreed settlement of our problems and, hopefully then, of our violence."

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